



Armed Red Shirts in Laurinburg on Election Day, 1898

Image: State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh

most either hid in their homes or left, making neighborhoods appear to be vacant. Josephus Daniels believed that Red Shirt activity was successful because speechmaking and other forms of intimidation failed to keep black voters away from political activity as effectively as did the Red Shirts. Throughout southeastern North Carolina, the Red Shirts rode day and night to intimidate black voters and to bully white Populists and Republicans into voting for the Democratic Party.³⁸

Although the organizational structure of the Red Shirts is unclear, the brigades were carefully orchestrated displays of Democratic Party militancy, used at intervals both to stir up white sentiments and to oppress black or Republican voters. The Red Shirt movement likely grew out of, or was managed by, the White Government Unions founded by the Democratic Party. Red Shirt rallies coincided with WGU activities and featured many of the same

speakers as those who stumped throughout the state on behalf of the Democratic Party.³⁹

Thus, Simmons rallied together men who could speak, write, and ride to support the white supremacy campaign in a well-organized statewide effort. Daniels summed up the campaign when he observed that “every white man who could talk was on the stump; every white man who could write was writing, and every white man who could ride and could influence a vote was enthusiastically at work.”⁴⁰

Simmons and his committee took still more steps, including use of the clergy and women’s influence, to convince white male voters that duty and responsibility obligated them to cast a Democratic vote. In a later campaign, Simmons wrote that he

³⁸ Several instances of Red Shirt intimidation of whites can be found. Most notably are the references given by Benjamin Keith in his autobiography and in testimony given during the 1899 contested election. W. J. Harriss, a white Republican, testified that Democrats continuously attempted to force him to join them, even women, who “made efforts to intimidate ... by remarks and tell me individually to come over and be a white man.” Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 292-5; Prather, “Red Shirt Movement,” 176; *Contested Election Case*, 387.

³⁹ Henry Hewett, Wilmington printer, testified that he was a member of the White Government Union and that he rode in the parade attributed to the Red Shirts and attended the speeches that followed in Hilton Park. For details of the planning and events surrounding the Laurinburg and Wilmington Red Shirt rallies, see articles in the *Wilmington Messenger* and *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 1-10, 1898. Further, John Bellamy testified that he knew “there were men, and they were gentlemen, many of them men of property and character and influence, who wore a red shirt at some of their political meetings as a simple badge of their Democratic club. *Contested Election Case*, 219-220, 252-253.

⁴⁰ Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 294.